

Charles Violet Born in Villejésus

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*(Note to the Reader: This is the first draft of a chapter that will be part of an upcoming book with a working title of A **Violette History**. The authors welcome comments, criticism, corrections, or additions to the text during its draft review period. Address comments directly using the emails above or through the feedback link at the web site for the Violette Family Association – www.VioletteFamily.org.)*

Thursday, February 13, 1716, was an exciting day for a young couple in Villejésus, France named Louis and Marie Violet. Married eleven months before, on January 7th, 1715, now at ages 26 and 23 they were expecting their first child.

Father and mother were both from Villejésus, and their families probably had been there for many generations before. Information found in recent times may indicate that the home in Villejésus may have been in the Violet family since 1640, or about 50 years before Louis was born. Though we don't have family records for Louis, we do know that Marie's father – Louis Doux – was born around 1649 and would die three years after his grandson was born. We don't have information about Marie's mother – Jeanne Rivet.

Yes, the baby born that February day was a boy - named Charles Francois Violet. He was the first of four children for Louis and Marie. Catherine would be born on July 24, 1718; Jeanne on May 23, 1719 and would die two years later; and Francois on April 1, 1725 only to die two weeks later on April 15th. We don't have a record of when either Louis or Marie died.

Where is Villejésus? What was the town like?

Let's see where in the world Charles was born. Map 1 shows where the town is located. It is in the present-day Administrative Region of Poitou-Charentes, as shown in the closer look in Map 2. That Region was divided into the four Departments Charente, Charente-Maritime, Deux-Sevres, and Vienne after the French Revolution in 1789. Villejésus' population in 2008 was 568 and it occupies 6.65 square miles. The elevation in the area ranges from 200 to 495 feet above sea level. Map 3 shows an aerial view of Villejésus today.

It was from this area that most of the Acadian and Cajun populations of North America (settlements founded in New Brunswick, Louisiana, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, Maine and Newfoundland) came. Their ancestors emigrated from the region during the 17th and 18th centuries, as we will see happen later in Charles' life.

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Map 1: Villejésus, France



Map 2: Villejésus in the Poitou-Charentes Région of France

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Map 3: Aerial view of Villejésus

Villejésus has several picturesque buildings such as the Town Hall shown in Photo 1. Villejésus also has a culinary specialty called Cagouilles – these are snails, but they call them by the special name instead of the traditional French escargot. They even have a statue of the cagouille at Villejésus!



Photo 1: Villejésus Town Hall



Photo 2: Statue of Cagouille in Villejésus

Learning about our ancestors and their origins

The quest to learn about our ancestors was a long and difficult one. It started around 1974 when Rita Violette Lippe from Methuen MA wanted to learn more about her Violette

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heritage and culminated with 47 Violettes traveling to France to see the places and talk with people in those places where the Violette family traces its roots. That trip in 1982 was chronicled by Bill Caldwell, journalist with the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, in his article from October 3, 1982. Let's hear how Mr. Caldwell tells the story:

Maine Sunday Telegram, October 3, 1982

The American cousins go home and discover the love of family

Columnist Bill Caldwell accompanied members of the Violette family, many of whom are from Maine, to France last month as they went in search of their family's past. Struck by the emotion generated by the unusual trip, Caldwell filed this personal report.

VILLEJÉSUS, France — Hesitantly, one by one, the Violettes from North America, 47 of them, stepped from their bus to meet the Violets from Villejésus, France.

Villejésus is a tiny and ancient hamlet in southwestern France containing 540 souls. The town, not much more than a bend in the road, is a cluster of tile red roofs, chipped stone barns and homes, an old gray church, a cafe with a decrepit billiard table and an oldtime U.S. one-armed bandit converted to francs, and a few winding, cobblestone, narrow streets.

It is tranquil, imperturbable, geared to the slow process of raising grapes in hillside vineyards century after century.

This is Villejésus — the village of Jesus — into which the Violettes of Maine and North America step out of their bus: a bald, barrel-chested trash collector from Augusta, a potato farmer from Van Buren, a nun from California, a bookkeeper from Methuen, Mass., a coach from Winslow, a backhoe operator from Oakland, an auto dealer from Grand Falls, an old pilot from Hallowell, a school teacher from Cony High.

Within a moment, the Violettes from North America are embracing the Violets of Villejésus, cousins all — families separated for more than two centuries by 3,000 miles of ocean, wars of independence and revolution, unknown to each other until this moment.

Never has there been so much happiness and joy or so many tears and so many smiles, or so much unbridled love of family in the tiny town of Villejésus as there was all day and all night on Thursday, Sept. 22, 1982.

That was the unforgettable day when the Violette family of Van Buren, Maine, came to this hamlet in the Cognac country of France to find the

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roots from which they had sprung more than 200 years ago. It was the first time a Franco American family had come home to its ancestral roots since the fall of Acadia in 1759.

The bells from the ancient church rang out in celebration. It is the same church where Louis Violet and Marie Doux of this parish exchanged marriage vows in January 1715.

Louis was the farmer who fathered Charles. Charles is the Violet who sailed from La Rochelle in 1749 to help colonize French North America, failed and abandoned his 6-year-old son Francois in Louisbourg. (*Ed note: Charles actually went to French North America to work on the military fortifications at Louisbourg. It was his roofing business that failed, and he had to assign care of his two children to friends as part of his bankruptcy settlement. See later chapters for "the rest of the story".*)

And Francois grew up to become first Frenchman to raise a pioneering family in Maine and to father 23 children alongside Violet Stream, now the site of the town of Van Buren.

The creaking doors of the ancient church, seldom used these days, swung open and the Violettes of Maine walked down the aisle arm-in-arm with the Violets of Villejésus.

In this church the Violets and Violettes celebrated a special communion Mass of family reunion. The vested priest delivered his short sermon in mellifluous French, praising the gift of families rejoined by heaven after so many generations of separation, worshipping together in the church where their mutual forefathers were baptized and married.

The voices from Waterville, from Van Buren and Augusta and South Portland mingled loudly and well with the voices of the French villagers.

Mass was over- As Violettes and Violets came out into the sunshine and met together under the ancient trees on the village green, the church bells pealed out again in joyous sound.

On the outskirts of Villejésus, farmers tending their grapes in the vineyards looked up, startled at the ringing of the bells on a Thursday morning.

On the cobblestone village streets, old French grandmothers, dressed in long shiny black dresses and white beribboned caps, opened their tiny houses to cousins from far away.

This was the scene that melted the minds and hearts of the travelers from North America. From small Yankee villages, from the coast of California,

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from the potato fields of Maine and the border towns, they had traveled far to discover their roots.

They had flown to Paris, traveled by bus eight hours to the port of La Rochelle from which their ancestors sailed, stayed in Rochefort and Saintes and Angouleme, digging into their pasts, so long forgotten.

Now they stood at the watershed, the simple village whence the Violettes had sprung. They felt they were home.

They grasped the vineyard-worn hand of the man from Villejésus standing by them. Flesh pressed to flesh. Eyes looked into eyes- And no man nor woman showed shame at the tears that filled their eyes or the strange joy that surged in their hearts.



Photo 3: Hillside Vineyards Surround Villejésus

The villagers and the visitors walked through the narrow streets to a house on a hillside bend in the road. It was a house of chinked stone and red tiled roof, boarded up because the present owner, a long-retired school teacher, was sick in a distant hospital

This was the old Violet homestead, traced back to deeds of the 1640s. It was no beauty. Windows and doors were boarded up now- There were holes where plaster had fallen away, scars where bullets once hit. And the barns stood silent and empty.

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But to the travelers it seemed a sacred place. And suddenly the mayor of Villejésus felt their unspoken message.

In a happy shout, the mayor announced, “We of Villejésus will place a plaque on these walls commemorating this as the Violet ancestral home. And it shall stay there in memory of your homecoming today.”

And then we moved on to the Salon de Fetes, a town meeting room, for a “vin d’honneur,” and speeches and toasts. The hosts uncorked endless bottles of Pineau, the fine regional drink made through a delicious, fruity combination of unfermented grapes and aged local cognac.

But soon the hallowed hour of noon arrived, and the bus and cars carried the throng to ancient farmhouses nearby where a splendid country feast had been prepared to welcome the cousins from America.

Horseshoe tables for 25 were set up in low ceilinged rooms with dazzling white cloths and a myriad of country flowers. Great crusty loaves of fresh bread the size and shape of life rings and steaming bowls of golden turnip soup awaited us. Then came platters of cold jellied rabbit and vegetables. Then huge tureens of country chicken stew and scores of bottles of wine from the vineyards.

Violets and Violettes began singing the old country folk songs together, songs that had crossed the Atlantic two centuries and more before and had stayed alive.

Then came delicious tarts from every fruit and cakes overflowing with homemade butter and home-grown eggs. And enormous trays of cheeses — Brie and Camembert and mysterious tasting cheeses made from the milk of local goats, goats that are bigger than Maine deer and just as brown in fur. Then trays of fresh fruit, just picked from trees in the wall garden, still warm and pouring with juice from the French sun.

Finally, platters of fresh pears, grapes and apples, sliced into a nectar concoction, were served with strong, bitter coffee and the crowning glory of double distilled, fiery strong cognac, made here in the finest of France’s cognac country.

Newly found cousinship was in full flood. The decibels of excited, passionate, affectionate, joyous sound peaked by 4 p.m.

There was no language barrier at all. In an extraordinary discovery, we found that the French spoken by the Violette families from Maine, New Brunswick and Quebec was almost precisely the same as the French spoken by the farming families of Villejésus and Fontenille.

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The peculiarities of pronunciation and accent — and even the patois and local idioms that mark the French spoken in Maine — are almost precisely the same ones that mark the accent in these villages in the Charentes district of France.

This local dialect came across the ocean in sailing ships 233 years ago and persists today, almost unchanged on both sides of the ocean.

For the last two or three hours of the afternoon, the Franco-Americans were whisked off to visit the famed vineyards and wine and cognac distilleries of the region. But the day was just a curtain-raiser to what Villejésus had planned for the evening reunion with the Violettes.

By 7 p.m., the Hotel de Ville, the tiny town hall of Villejésus, was thronged. Farmers, back from their vineyards, came dressed in Sunday black, with beaming wives and wide-eyed children. Mayors from surrounding villages came in tricolor ribbons, sashes and medallions of office.

Pineau flowed again. Again, speeches, toasts across the sea, exchanges of gifts. Before long the French formalities were swamped in a torrent of bonhomie.

The happy mob moved into the assembly room of the village school next door. There the women of Villejésus had staged a “fete au campagne” — a mammoth, endless country supper.



Photo 4: Rita Violette Lippe toasting with Mayor of Villejésus

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Hundreds were there, downing local pate de foie gras, cold chicken, cold pork, cheeses, magnificent pastries and uncounted liters of wine.

Children ran happily through the mob; parents danced. The Americans handed out violet baseball caps emblazoned with the name “Violette” and staid French mayors wore them as badges of happy cousinship.

Women swapped photos of children, homes, grandchildren, ancestors; exchanged addresses; arranged for pen pals. The singing and dancing and music enveloped them all in unity.

Suddenly it was past 10 p.m. The Violettes from America climbed aboard their bus. The Violets from France stood on the village common, beside the church where we had jointly celebrated mass that morning, and waved to us in the moonlight.

Children, up way past bedtime, stood on the town walls and waved “au revoir.” And all shared in the same tears and simple human joy in finding each other.

Hunger for roots inspires search

This hunger to find out has grown widespread in America since the publication of Alex Haley’s book “Roots” and its television serial. This same hunger began haunting Rita Violette Lippe eight years ago in her hometown of Methuen, Mass.

She was a bookkeeper and wife and mother, hungry to know more about her Violette roots. She began digging intensely into the genealogical records, the church and state and parochial records of Violettes in the United States and Canada.

In Augusta, Maurice Violette, a Navy veteran of 20 years and now a market analyst for Central Maine Power Co., was making a similar search. They joined forces.

They traced the Violette ancestry back to the city of Louisbourg, Isle Royale, Acadia; to Charles Violet, the first of the line who emigrated from France in 1749. There the trail went cold and at first seemed to end without any documentary links back into France.

Nevertheless, Rita Violette Lippe set her sights on a family reunion at her home in Methuen in 1978, expecting 75 “cousins” might show up. But more than 310 came!

They came because Rita had written letters to more than 200 Violette families across the nation. Their names largely had been gathered by

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Roderick Violette, an airline pilot from San Mateo, Calif, who copied Violette names from phone books in airports across the country.

“I got 20 friends to make 1,500 meatballs and 48 bowls of chop suey in my kitchen, and we fed well over 300 Violettes at our first family gathering in 1978. Two days after it was over, I felt an awful letdown and found that we had \$119 profit,” says Rita, “so I used the money to send out the first Violette Family newsletter.

“Replies and donations for more research came pouring in. Soon I was up to 1,200 newsletters. Then we had the next family reunion in Augusta in 1980, and over 500 Violettes came. Last year, we had the third reunion in Van Buren, where the first Violette, Francois, settled in Maine. This time over 800 came from 23 states and Canada. Maine Supreme Court Justice Elmer Violette was chairman.”

At that meeting, it was decided to send a delegation of Violettes to France to retrace the roots of the family, based on research already done. This Sept. 16, the delegation gathered at Logan Airport, Boston, to fly to Paris. I went along for the Telegram,

Departure stirs emotion

The travel agent in charge wept. “Dammit! The sight of all those Violettes makes me cry! I’ve seen a thousand departures and never shed a tear before,” said travel agent Kathy Kearney of Crimson Travel, as she and I watched Rita Violette Lippe marshal her huge family toward the night flight to France.

“Families in America are splitting up today, disintegrating. But here are the Violettes all coming together to find their roots in a French village!”

She watched Rita call out a dozen names or so at a time. “Come forward together. Until tonight some of you may never have seen each other before. But each of you is a close relative. Each in this group is descended from the same great-great-grandfather.”

Rita, the genealogist, handed each group of eight to 10 people, a single sheet tracing their common ancestry over 200 years.

The Violettes aboard the TWA flight to Paris were all descended from Francois Violet, probably the first Frenchman to pioneer and raise a family at what is now Van Buren. Rita and others had fairly easily documented that fact. But where did Francois come from?

Abandoned boy provides link

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The search was hard. The writing in the records in the basements of Louisbourg, Nova Scotia, was in ancient script, old French sometimes, often yellow-stained and brittle.

But finally, with the help of Eric Krause, supervisor of old documents at the Fortress of Louisbourg, court records dated June 1751 were discovered.

One document showed that Charles Violet, who had shipped from La Rochelle to the New World as a would-be colonist aboard the vessel "L'Intrepide" in 1749, had given up his only living son, Francois, age 6, to five friends, due to the death of his wife, Marie David.

In the same proceedings, Charles Violet, who listed his occupation as roofer, pleaded bankruptcy.

More documents revealed that Charles married again and by 1759 had negotiated passage back to France with his new wife, a Marie Anne Sudois of La Rochelle, France. (*Ed Note: Actually, Charles and Marie were deported with the French as the French forces were leaving Louisbourg.*) However, he failed to mention that he had left behind in Acadia his young son, Francois, the boy destined to become the patriarch of all American Violettes, who number 30,000 today.

It took painstaking research in France, Canada and the United States to trace Charles' and Marie David's origins, to positively link Francois to Charles and to trace Charles back into France.

Help came from a wholly unexpected quarter in 1978. A group of Paris businessmen, with roots to the ancient Provence de Maine in France, came to the United States on a visit. They decided to end their tour in Augusta, capital of the American State of Maine.

That meeting in Augusta brought Maurice Violette into contact with Claude Meche of Paris. By trade, Claude Meche was a roofer (at Versailles), just as Charles Violet had been a roofer in 1749 when he sailed to the New World.

Meche agreed to work as the legman and on-the-spot researcher into the origins of the Violet family in France.

Meche broke the ground so well and made so many discoveries that in 1979 Maurice Violette and his friend Ray Fecteau, a barber in Augusta, flew to France on their vacations and spent a month with Meche, bird-dogging the trail of Charles Violet through the villages and musty records of southwestern France.

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They returned to Maine with documentary proof Charles Violet and wife and son set sail to Louisbourg in 1749; that Charles and his second wife had returned to France and settled at Rochefort; and that Charles had, upon her death, married a third time.

They tracked Charles back to his birthplace and to his first marriage in Villejésus, and found there the birth records of his abandoned son Francois. (*Ed Note: Francois was born in Saintes, not Villejésus*)

Discovery of these early links to North America — and the fact that descendants of the Violets were living and flourishing — caused waves of news in French papers and television.

Among the American Violette family, gathered over 800 strong in Van Buren last summer, the documents caused even greater waves.

These Violettes had been proud of their ancestor Francois, who had rafted down (*Ed Note: Francois went upriver; the St John River is really placid in most reaches.*) the turbulent St. John River to where Van Buren stands now, who had married three times, fathered 23 children and began the Violette clan. Not bad for an abandoned boy!

Now the clan was eager to get their own feet on French soil, to see whence they had sprung, to meet long-lost cousins in Villejésus.

Thus on the night of Sept. 16, 47 of them boarded the plane for France. The sight of this conjunction of family and history in Logan Airport made the travel agent cry.

Trip fulfills shared dream

They came from all over America and Canada and from the hard working class. More than half of the 47 came from Maine, where the Violettes had started.

All 47 had roots going back to Van Buren and the abandoned boy who became patriarch of the clan, Francois. Their faces, their laughter and tears, their characters and jokes and emotions will be imprinted always in my memory.

They were not well-to-do retirees or college kids traveling on Daddy. Each Violette had scrimped, drained savings or borrowed money—to make this homecoming pilgrimage, price \$1,250.

Each told me they had secretly nursed a dream, a yearning to somehow get to France, to discover their roots. But until each set foot on French soil, none believed the dream would come true.

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I see each of them now as I write this account of their trip. But there are too many stories, too many backgrounds to recite here.

The quietest man on the bus was Vinal Violette. His name was misspelled Final Violette, and he was indeed often late.



Photo 5: (L - R) Vinal Violette, Maurice Violette, Mayor's wife, Mayor of Fontenille

He favored a black coat, always wore a tie, then bought himself a black beret, and the result was that Final Violette from Van Buren looked more French than any Frenchman in Paris. Not until the last moments of our homeward flight did this quiet man tell me the moving gist of his story.

“I have some of the last land from the original Violette holdings. Farmed it mostly in potatoes. The market was bad. Had to sell all but 400 acres outside of Van Buren. Gave up the old homestead and took an apartment in Van Buren. Now I work as a steel rigger down in Hinckley and go home on weekends.

“But,” he said leaning close to my plane seat, “I am a bachelor. I’ve turned 61. And I’ve got the last 400 acres of the original Violette land in Violette hands: And I’ve got no kids. No sons. Just two nieces, one in Las Vegas, the other in Florida.

“After being on this trip to our roots, after seeing the people in Villejésus, it bothers me to think I may be the last of the Violettes on the last of the original Violette land. What shall I do, at 61?”

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I advised him to get married. Maybe to a woman from Villejésus.

Many of the Violettes came as strangers to each other. But after 10 days they parted as the closest friends, linked by roots they had found together, families and cousins they had never known.

It was a joy to witness how quickly the French too, in the small towns, took these unknown cousins from America to their hearts. When they met and talked together, it was clear they were cut from the same basic cloth, be it hundreds of years ago.

It was clear they were deeply moved, everlastingly changed by the people they met, the cousins they found, the roots they discovered.

“I have seen a new world with my eyes, and my head is swimming with new sounds and new sights I never thought to see,” said Jeanette Betit as we parted Boston.

“I’m filled with those things I saw and those people I met. But what will last forever from this trip is what I now carry in my heart.

We will learn more about Charles and his travels and his family in subsequent chapters, as we follow his movements and introduce other members of our ancestral family.

But now let’s hear about that trip to France from one of our members: Diane Violette Pruett VFA #64 wrote about it in the Violette Family Association Newsletter for November 1982. Here’s her story:

VOL 6 No. 4 November 1982

Enfin! The Violette clan finally met at Logan Int. Airport on Thursday, Sept. 16 for the very much anticipated ancestral trip to France. There were Violettes from Maine, Mass., Conn., Calif., Washington & Canada. Thanks to Rita Violette Lippé, we were able to discover to what degree we were all related. Each person was given a "family tree sheet" which provided us with the information that traced us all back to Louis Violet. We discovered to whom we were more closely related and chatted amongst ourselves before the flight. Needless to say, we were all excited and looking forward to the next eleven days.

On Friday, we arrived in Paris at 9:30 PM (with a loss of 6 hrs). We were all exhausted but simply dazzled with Charles de Gaulle Airport. We were greeted by our guide and bus driver and immediately boarded. Our first stop was Vallet where we were graciously met by our cousins, Renée Viollet Sanarens, Françoise Viollet Marche' and Andre Viollet. Françoise presented each of us with a key to the city (in the form of a corkscrew) with a Violette inscription. The Mayor André Barre formally greeted us

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and entertained us with wine and pastries. We left Vallet and arrived in beautiful LaRoche where we got our first glimpse of the outdoor cafés, the narrow streets, and the boutique shops.

On Saturday, we were greeted at the Hôtel de Ville by representatives of the city. We were graciously welcomed and invited to "dégust" some Pineau Noir and Cognac. The rest of the day was spent touring the city. All of us were impressed by this lovely harbor city. We sadly left LaRoche and headed to Rochefort where we were to spend the next three nights.

On Sunday, we met with the Mayor of Rochefort, Jean Louis Frot, and again had a wonderful wine reception. Our highlight of the day was a visit to St. Louis Church where Charles Violet was buried. We also visited the Corderie from which Charles departed for Acadia in 1749. We toured the Pierre Lote' Museum and other sites.

On Monday we were warmly received in Saintes by the Assistant Mayor, Bernard Thiebaud. Saintes is one of the oldest cities in France which dates back to 100 B.C. We visited the roman amphitheater, arch, abbey, and the Church of St. Vivien, where Francois Violette was baptized in 1744. This is also where Charles was married to Marie David in 1741. As we were entering the church, the bells were ringing - just for us! Very moving!

On Sunday we arrived in Angoulême and we were met at the Hôtel de Ville for another wine reception. Along the route to Angoulême we saw vineyards galore! We visited St. Peter's Cathedral and the Hôtel de Ville. That evening a few of us went to a concert in St. Peter's Cathedral.

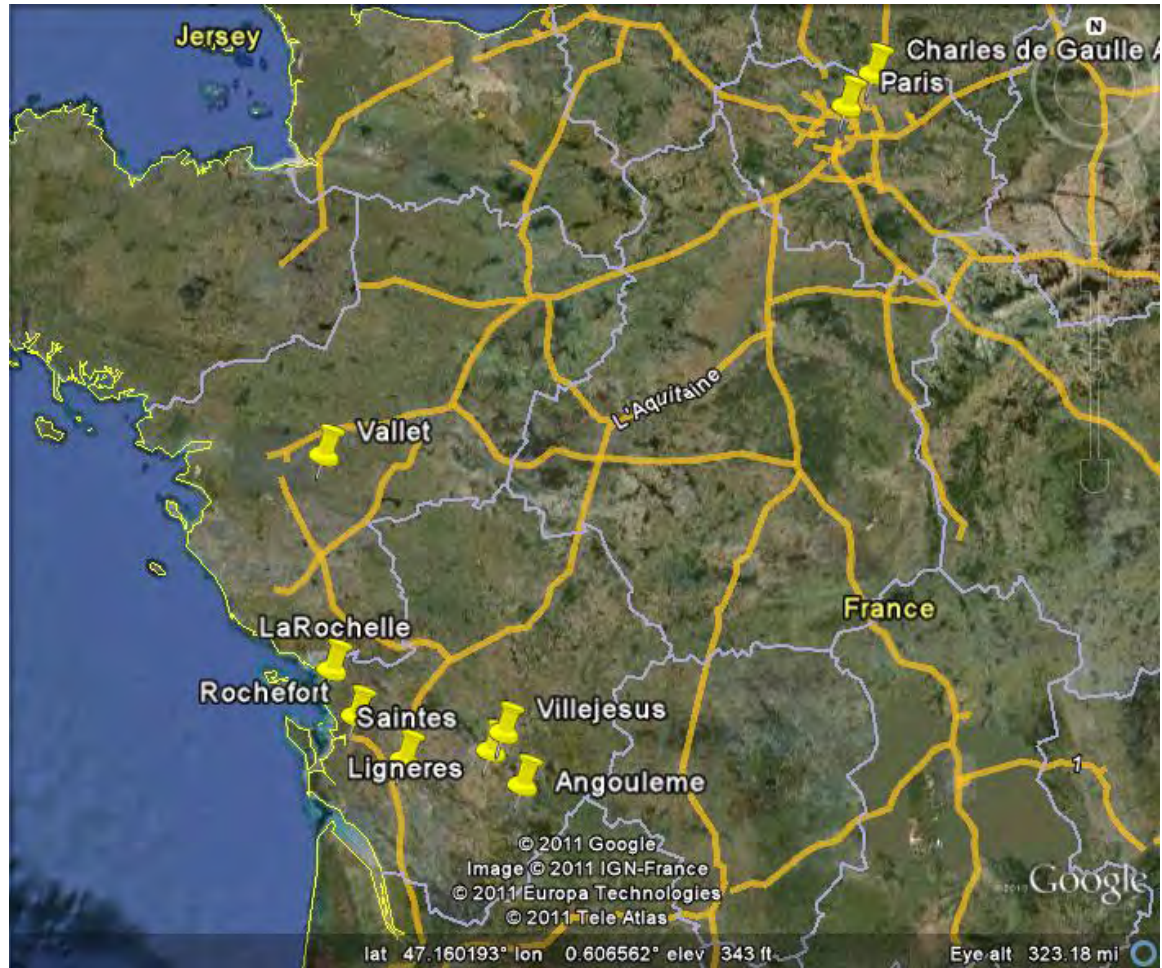
Wednesday was the highlight of our trip! We departed from Angoulême to Villejésus and had Mass in the Church of Villejésus where Louis and Marie Doux were married in 1715. Again, we were received by the beautiful church bells. After Mass we were taken by bus to Fontenille and warmly received by Mayor Fernand Videau and his wife. There we met many of our cousins from France. We had lunch in a restaurant owned and operated by a charming young French couple. Our meal was fantastic! In the afternoon we toured two distilleries. The first one was a small family-owned one and the other was the famous Ricard Distillery in Ligneres. We returned to Villejésus where another wine reception awaited us. Mayor J. P. Montussac greeted us and invited us to have a buffet dinner in the community hall. All the people of Villejésus were invited thus having another opportunity to speak with our cousins. This was a very emotional, heart-warming day for all!

Thursday was a very much needed "catch-up" day. Most of us shopped in Angoulême, rested or toured the city on our own.

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Friday we left for Paris at 900 AM. We stopped in Amboise for lunch and had a chance to see the castle there. In a chapel in the castle is where Leonardo da Vinci is buried. We rode along the well-known Loire River Valley and caught glimpses of other castles along the way. After settling into our hotels, most of us went on an illumination tour of Paris. Beautiful!

On Saturday we had a guided tour of the famous Castle of Versailles. The gardens, flowers, and fountains were absolutely breath-taking. In the afternoon, we had free time to shop or tour.



Map 4: Places visited during France trip

Sunday, our last full day, was an extremely busy one. First, we had Mass at Notre Dame de Paris, then we toured the city and stopped for lunch near the Louvre. We were given 1 hr. to visit this famous art museum. Later we saw the famous Eiffel Tower, the Arc of Triumph, the left bank, Champs Elysees, and many other important historical sites. We rode up the hill to Montmartre where we saw a spectacular view of Paris. Some people went

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to the Moulin Rouge that evening, others ventured on the metro to visit other parts of Paris.

Monday morning we were taken to Charles de Gaulle Airport for our return flight to Boston. Aside from all the guided tours, visits to cities, wine receptions, etc., the most touching part of the trip to me was actually meeting our Violette cousins in Vallet, Fontenille and Villejésus. Our French cousins are truly sincere and beautiful people. We were deeply moved by their warmth, their hospitality and their genuine interest in our familial ties. Needless to say, the trip was a most gratifying and emotional one, and one which we shall never forget.

Finally, and most importantly, the Violettes and friends of the Violettes who (bravely) took the trip are the people who made the voyage a success. Without their enthusiasm, encouragement, stamina and love for each other, this trip could not possibly have been as worthwhile as it was. The friendships formed among us shall never be forgotten. We are all anxiously awaiting to see each other at the next reunion (if not before!).

Diane Violette Pruett #64

The Research Challenge: Another Language, Another Time

So just what did Maurice, Rita, and their helpers Claude Meche and Ray Fecteau have to deal with in tracking our ancestors? When the Villejésus origin finally came into focus they were fortunate to locate old records from the parish of Villejésus: the records of centuries of marriages, births, deaths, burials for the village. Those of us who are used to today's documents would be dismayed to see and try to work with the documents of that era – the mid-18th century. To start with, all records were, of course, in the French language and in the vernacular of that region. Then, to make it worse, all records had to be handwritten and by many different hands, with many different handwriting styles. In the section that follows we can see some of those source documents that pertain to the Villejésus era in our history.

Louis Violet and Marie Doux marry

The first item shows the extract of the record of this marriage.

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Mairie
de
VILLEJÉSUS

CHARENTE
16140 Aligre

Téléphone 05.10.21

L'an de grâce mil sept cent quinze du même jour
et au ci-dessus ont été épousés :
Louis VIOLLET et Marie DOUX
les solennités de notre Sainte mère l'Eglise
bien et dûment obtenues en présence des sus nommés
et de Jean LAURENT de Marie LAURENT de Louis DOUX
et ont sousigné; par nous sousigné desservant
VILLEJÉSUS

Au registre sont les signatures

27 07 79

Document 1: The year of our Lord seventeen hundred and fifteen on the same day indicated below were married Louis VIOLLET and Marie DOUX. The blessing of our Holy Mother the Church being duly received in the presence of the below enumerated Jean LAURENT and Marie LAURENT and Louis DOUX and they have signed below. By our signature, serving VILLEJÉSUS. The signatures are on the register.

Following is a copy of the actual page.

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Le jour de grace mil sept cent quatorze le 17
 premier jour de ^{juin} ont été épousés en face de
 notre mère ^{de} l'église des solennités précédemment
 gardées et observées et ordonnances du Roy Louis d'Orléans
 et Marguerite marciot et présences des sous signés et de
 Laurent gaulier ^{curé} de marie Simbaud sœur du dit du
 Coust, de Jean mangot pere, de Louis mangot oncle, de
 Jean et François Baraud Cousins et plusieurs autres parents
 et amis qui n'ont leur ligner de ce Enquis par nous sous signés
 de l'ervant Villejésus.

1715. Robin ^{curé} de Villejésus

Le jour de grace mil sept cent quatorze le 17
 ont été épousés en face de notre mère ^{de} l'église des solennités
 précédemment gardées et observées et ordonnances du Roy
 François le dieu et François le herichet le septiesme jour
 des mois de janvier es présences de Pierre le dieu pere
 de François le dieu aulli pere du dit le dieu, de Jean leu motre
 Cousin, de Jacques de Jacques domain aulli Cousin de Pierre
 d'ampute aulli Cousin germain, d'une part, et de Jean herichet
 de Jacques et Jean li alé Evres et plusieurs autres parents
 et amis qui n'ont leur ligner: soit les sous signés comme
 aulli du mesme jour et en présences des mesmes curés
 et autres sous signés ont été épousés en face de notre
 mère ^{de} l'église des solennités bien et durement observées
 ont été épousés, Jean tau res de au et marie uant
 de pin; présans de Jacques de pin et François de carde

Le jour de grace mil sept cent quatorze le 17
 ont été épousés Louis violet et marie
 Doux des solennités de notre mère ^{de} l'église bien et
 durement observées en présence des sus nommés et de
 violet Jean Laurent de marie Laurent, de Louis Doux et autres
 sous signés par nous sous signés de l'ervant Villejésus

Le jour de grace 1715 le 7. janvier de l'ervant Villejésus
 de Charles et de marie laumotres a été Pierrein m. ^{curé}
 de l'ervant Villejésus et on a vu de l'ervant Villejésus
 sous signés.

Coust: ^{curé} de Villejésus

Charles Violet baptized

The first item shows the extract of the record of this baptism.

Charles Violet Born in Villejésus

MAIRIE
DE
VILLEJÉSUS
CHARENTE
18140 Aigre
Téléphone 96.10.21

Lo

17 Feb 1716

L'an de grace mil sept cent seize le treize
février a été baptisé
Charles VIOLET
Fils de Louis VIOLET
ET de Marie DOUX
le parrain a été Charles REVEILLAUD
et la marraine Marie LAIDET qui ont déclaré
ne savoir signer

17.02.79

Document 2: The year of our Lord seventeen hundred and sixteen the thirteenth of February was baptized Charles Violet son of Louis VIOLET and Marie DOUX, the godfather was Charles REVEILLAUD and the godmother Marie LAIDET, who declared they did not know how to sign.

Following is a copy of the actual page.

Charles Violet Born in Villejésus

l'an de grace mil sept cent soixante Le douze fourmier à cette
Sainte Marguerite Billochon fille de Charles Billochon
et de Marie Anne Delivere Les parrain à cette messe d'ici
Le grand prestre de la paroisse de poitiers et la maraine
demoiselle marquerite de Couffaines née du jour de devant
par moyennes tous signé de Le grand prestre
Le Sarrage
de Villejésus

L'an de grace mil sept cent soixante j'oret que d'icelle
à été inhumé dans le cimetière de cette paroisse de
Sainte Marguerite d'anthoine robain après avoir reçu les sacre-
ments de charité et extrenonction pendant la messe
en présence de moi pasteur prestre de la paroisse qui a fait
les offices et plusieurs de ses parents et autres personnes
Le Sarrage Le Sarrage Le Sarrage
de Villejésus de Villejésus de Villejésus

L'an de grace mil sept cent soixante Le douze fourmier à cette
Sainte Marguerite Charles violet fils de Louis violet et Marie cores la
parrain à cette messe Charles veuilleux et la maraine Marie Laidet
qui a déclaré ne savoir signer Le Sarrage
de Villejésus de Villejésus de Villejésus

L'an de grace mil sept cent soixante Le douze fourmier à cette
Sainte Marguerite Pierre Goussard fils de Louis Goussard et de
Marie Vouche Le parrain à cette messe Pierre Goyard
notaire et procureur de la paroisse de la paroisse de la paroisse
et la maraine demoiselle Marie Babin qui ont signé
avec moy cures tous signé Marie Babin
Le Sarrage
de Villejésus de Villejésus de Villejésus

L'an de grace mil sept cent soixante Le douze fourmier à cette
Sainte Marguerite Simon Charignon né du jour de devant

What was happening in the world at that time

France had a new king – five-year-old Louis XV – was crowned the September before following the death of Louis XIV, who had reigned for 72 years.

The Gulf Coast of North America was being settled and developed. Natchez, one of the oldest towns on the Mississippi River, was founded in 1716. Natchitoches was founded

Charles Violet Born in Villejésus

as the first permanent European settlement in the Louisiana Territory, after Biloxi (1699) and Mobile (Alabama) in 1702.

Meanwhile, in the northeastern part of North America Britain and France were laying claims and creating settlements. Map 4 shows how that area was divided by those two powers after 1713. Prior to that time the whole area had been claimed by France, but they had to give up to the British the lands shown in red in Map 4 at the end of that most recent conflict. Louisbourg, established in 1713 on Cape Breton Island (Île Royale), will play a big role in Charles' future!



Map 5: British and French claims in North America